

Achilles' Sword? (Gods and Weapons in *Iliad* 22 and Beyond)

I investigate the relationships of Athena and Apollo to Achilles and Hector as betokened by weapons, examining the climactic combat in *Iliad* Book 22 vis-à-vis protean visual detail in Attic vase painting.

Athena's weapon is spear, and her darling Achilles' prime weapon is his hefty Pelian ash-spear (16.140-144; 19. 387-391).

Apollo's arsenal is complex. He is "Silverbow" (involved in archery of Hector's brothers prophet Helenus—*Il.* 13.583-595—and sniper Paris) but also "Goldensword." He plies a sword against Giants; the tondo of a Munich kylix shows him attacking Tityus with a sword, though holding bow and arrows behind him. Hector can have received his sword, like his famous coruscating helmet, *as a gift from Apollo* (11.353)—*pace* Hainsworth ad. v. However, in *Iliad* he faces Achilles without either, for he traded his sword away to Telamonian Ajax (7.303f) and wears Achilles' paternal armor, not his own, after 17.194-197.

According to Homer Achilles mortally wounds Hector with his mighty *spear*, after getting a second chance to ply it by invisible assistance from Athena (who deceived Hector into thinking Deiphobus stands beside him *with a second spear*, 22.294f!). Hector's death therefore comes from Achilles' Pelian ash, which Patroclus might not wield, which Hector therefore could not appropriate.

Iliadic Achilles does wear a sword. His new suit of armor includes the sword with which in Book 19 (372f) he girds himself, echoing/replacing the one Patroclus took (16.135f). With this he massacres Trojans at the river in Book 21 (19-26). Indeed in Book 1 he had a sword, and with it intended to slay Agamemnon (190-193) until Athena dissuaded him. That he would use *sword* to attack one who so offended *Apollo* though Chryses is appropriate. Later in the episode,

however, he threatened to kill the Atreid with his spear should Agamemnon attempt to take more than Briseis (1.303). To use his *spear* to forestall greater loss than *Athena* declared he must bear is likewise appropriate.

Hector has a spear, too, mentioned conspicuously in Books 6 (319f.) and 8 (494f). However, he lops off the blade of Ajax' spear in Book 16 with a *sword* (114-116). He casts his spear against Achilles in the Book 22 duel—accurately, but the Hephaestian shield deflects it (289-291). When he realizes he's doomed, he draws his sword (306f). Phoebus acquiescing, Hector accepts his fate. He falls by spear, to Achilles' immortal glory and thanks to Athena. Phoebus, opposite her, cannot abide such mortals who overstep their limits. He will respond. Hector, by a dying man's foresight (or good-bye boon of Apollonian prophecy?), predicts that Phoebus Apollo and Paris will avenge him (22.359f).

Five RF vases depicting the Achilles-versus-Hector duel play telling variations on the theme of gods-and-weapons. Four *show* Athena—visibly to us, invisibly to the human actors—as Hector falls; on three Apollo is also there.

Most famous is the British Museum's volute crater by the Berlin Painter [1]. We see Athena, spear up and aegis forward as if to second Achilles' incipient lunge, his spear pointed toward Hector. Hector falls backward, already wounded in the chest, *his* spear lowered. Apollo stands by him, raising an arrow parallel to his protégé's spear, aimed toward the Achaean enemy whom, by directing that very arrow from Paris' bow, he will kill so both patron-god *and* brother may avenge Hector.

The same painter's stamnos in Munich [2] shows Athena between/behind the combatants. No Apollo. This is closest to the Homeric narration: Achilles is ready to finish Hector off, his spear brandished for a lethal thrust. Hector, falling even lower than on the crater, holds, weakly,

only a *sword*. (Or ‘properly a sword’?) The goddess holds her helmet before her, toward Hector, as if indicating Achilles’ target.

In neither does the master merely, that is, exactly *illustrate* Homer in weaponry, let alone in engaged god(s).

A kylix “in the manner of Douris” in the Vatican [3] shows ‘correct’ weapons, but *both* deities. Athena backs Achilles, leveling his spear; Apollo, Hector, drawing his sword.

Similar is another stamnos at Barcelona by the Providence Painter [4]. Athena lacks other attributes, but holds a spear; Apollo—oddly if understandably from his robe misidentified as Artemis!—stands behind, bow in hand.

An anomalous fifth piece, a Vatican hydria by the Eucharides Painter [5] shows no god, Achilles with a sword, Hector futilely raising a broken spear. What it adds to inter-textual, inter-art conversation about arms and men and gods, occupies much of the paper.

[1] BM E468; LIMC I Achilleus 565 (B); Beazley Archive 201941

[2] Munich 2306; LIMC I 566; Beazley 201956

[3] Vatican H545; LIMC; I, 570 Beazley 205336

[4] Barcelona 589; not in LIMC; Beazley 207406

[5] Vatican H502; LIMC 568, no plate; Beazley 202257